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Initial Reaction to French Proposal for Rwanda Conference

(18)

General Reaction

RQ18

AF/C

Our preliminary reaction to the French proposal for an international conference on Rwanda is that it is similar in many respects to the regional refugee conference we ourselves have been pressing for. The focus is on repatriation of refugees, and the countries proposed for participation are essentially the same. However, the French prefer an "international" site (e.g., New York/Geneva or possibly Addis) as opposed to a regional site, with the UN SYG presiding. Moreover, the agenda is extremely ambitious and includes political issues that probably are not yet ripe for discussion.

Many
thanks

As our response, we suggest reiterating that our priority is a regional conference that focuses on regional cooperation and donor support to address the refugee problem. (See attached cable.) This conference was agreed to at the OAU summit and has strong support in the region. We want the conference to take place in Bujumbura, both to focus on the regional nature of the meeting and to provide a stabilizing influence to Burundi.

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Specific Comments on Proposed Conference Objectives

1. Refugees: This should be the focus of any discussion. The French say they hope the issue of security in the camps will have been resolved well before the conference. We doubt this would be the case (unless the conference is to be held in the distant future), and would think this would be an important agenda item.

2. and 3. Emergency aid and program of reconstruction: This sounds like the French may see this as a donors pledging session. We should avoid that. (We also note that some of the reconstruction assistance would go to the neighbors, i.e., Zaire.)

4. Political Stability: Political issues will undoubtedly be broached even in the refugee conference we propose, but we don't think an international conference to resolve the political issues would be productive at this point. Nonetheless, some of the subjects listed under this section could usefully be discussed in the context of our regional refugee conference (e.g., commitment not to allow territory to be used as staging ground for attacks on neighbors, confidence building measures between neighbors, cooperation of regional states with the war crimes tribunal, arrest, detention, etc.) It's when the French get into discussing internal Rwandan political issues (or, even worse, Burundi) that the conference moves into more problematic areas.

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